

April 4, 2023

Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Councilmembers:

I am the Founder and Interim Executive Director of [Main Street Connect](#) (Main Street) in Rockville, Maryland. Main Street was established as a 501(c)(3) organization in February 2017 and, in July 2020, opened the doors to a first-of-its-kind, affordable, accessible apartment building with 10,000 square feet of community space. Of the building's 70 apartments, 75% are affordable and 25% of these are designated for people with special needs. Main Street also offers a membership-based community to residents and non-residents of all abilities. Our 265+ members choose from 15+ social, educational, wellness and cultural programs each week, delivered by a diverse array of community partners. Located at the front of the Main Street building, [The Soulfull Café](#) offers employment for people of all abilities and an inclusive gathering space for the public. Main Street's research and evaluation efforts, including a [partnership with the University of Maryland](#), have demonstrated that we are improving the quality of life for residents and members of all abilities and for their families. Local, state and national groups have sought to learn from Main Street's groundbreaking model and we are actively providing leadership in the field of affordable, accessible, inclusive housing and community engagement.

Along with other members of Nonprofit Montgomery, we offer a warm welcome to the new County Councilmembers, and we thank the entire Council for your tireless work on behalf of County residents. We especially appreciate your partnership with the County's nonprofits and your recognition of the significant contributions made by these organizations.

Support for NDA Community Grants

Main Street supports the County Executive's proposed FY24 budget for **Non-Departmental Accounts (NDA) Community Grants**. In particular, we appreciate that:

- The grants provide opportunities for nonprofits that have not previously received county funding. Despite our significant impact, Main Street has yet to receive any community grant funding.
- The grants target \$1.5 million specifically to organizations that support individuals with disabilities, a woefully underserved group that struggles with financial hardship, isolation and lack of opportunity after exiting the school system at age 21.
- Funding levels were increased for the Underserved Communities Project grants (from \$750,000 in FY23 to \$1.26 million in FY24) and for the Nonprofit Technical Assistance and Management Support grants (from \$750,000 in FY23 to \$1 million in FY24). While we appreciate these increases, we understand that County nonprofits requested more than \$9 million for each category in FY23, so the needs are great.

We ask that the Council not make any changes to the above provisions of the County Executive's proposed budget unless it were to make further increases.

Request for Additional Inflationary Increase

While we appreciate the 3% inflationary increase that the County Executive included in his FY24 budget, Main Street asks that the Council add 3.6% to bring the total increase to 6.6%, which would match the rate of increase in the Consumer Price Index over the last year. We ask that the 6.6% increase be applied to community grants, contracts in departmental base budgets and multi-year contracts.

Request for Continued Simplification of the Grants Process

Additionally, Main Street asks that you continue to support a simplified grants process, including:

- Realistic timelines for applications, reporting and payment
- Support for indirect costs including administrative and evaluation expenses
- Streamlined submission of invoices and reimbursement claims
- A simplified and more flexible budget amendment process

Simplifying the process ensures that nonprofit staff time is not unduly diverted from focusing on the needs of the people they serve.

Support for Funding for Affordable Housing

Finally, we appreciate the County Executive's focus on affordable housing in the FY24 budget. Main Street is able to do what it does because we received a Housing Initiative Fund (HIF) loan from the County. We hope that the Council will prioritize multiple types of funding that support more affordable housing initiatives, including workforce housing.

Conclusion

Thank you for your commitment to the County's most vulnerable groups including people with disabilities, and thank you for your ongoing support of nonprofits like Main Street that are developing innovative solutions to the challenges faced by these groups. We respectfully request your consideration of the above requests so that nonprofits like Main Street can bring hope, opportunity and dignity to many more of the County's underserved residents.

Sincerely,

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